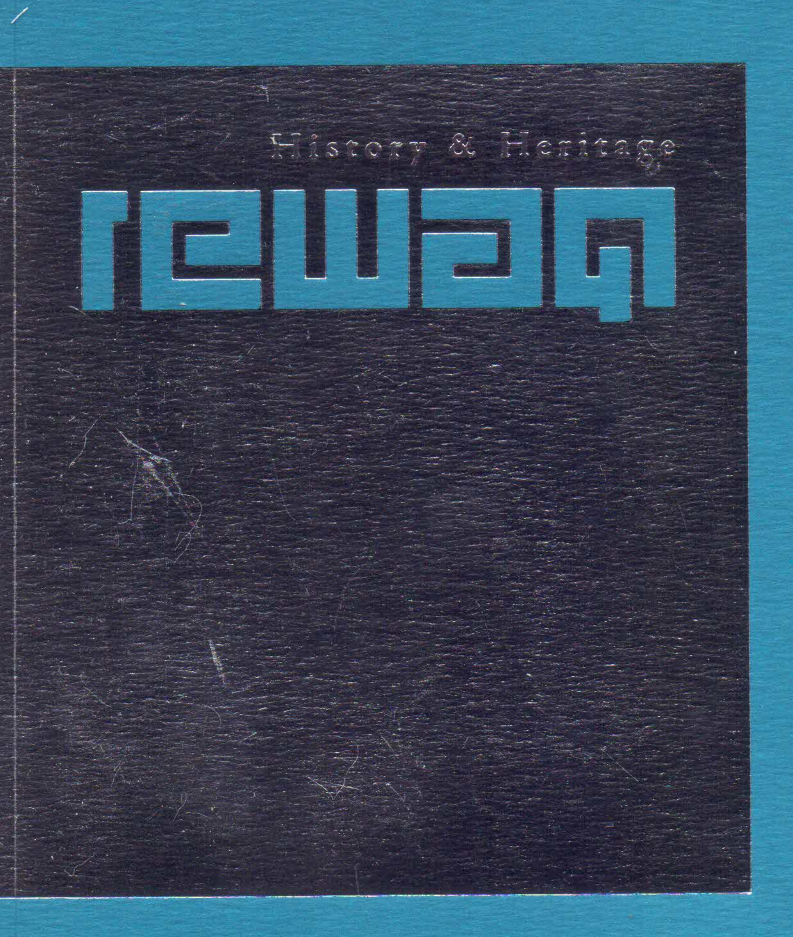
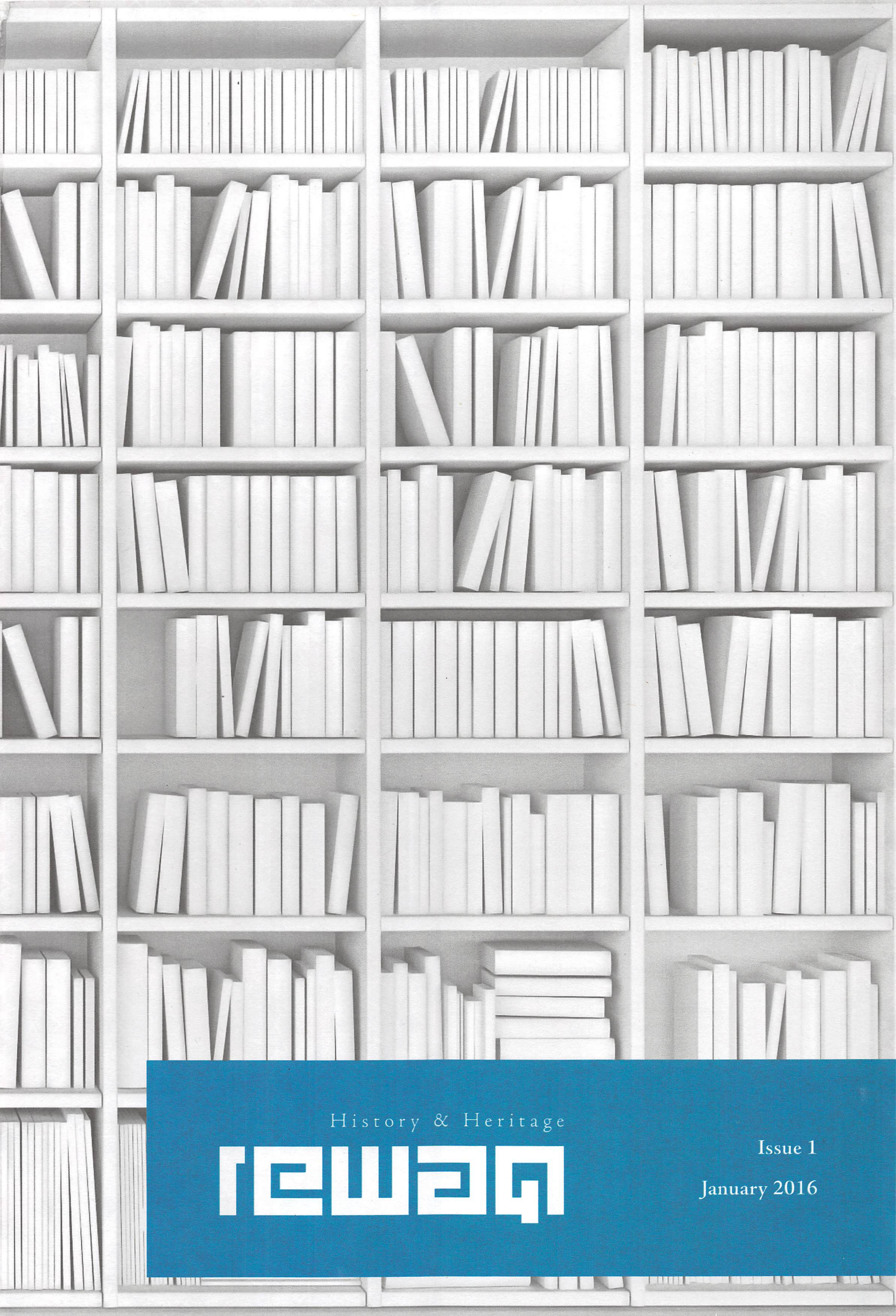




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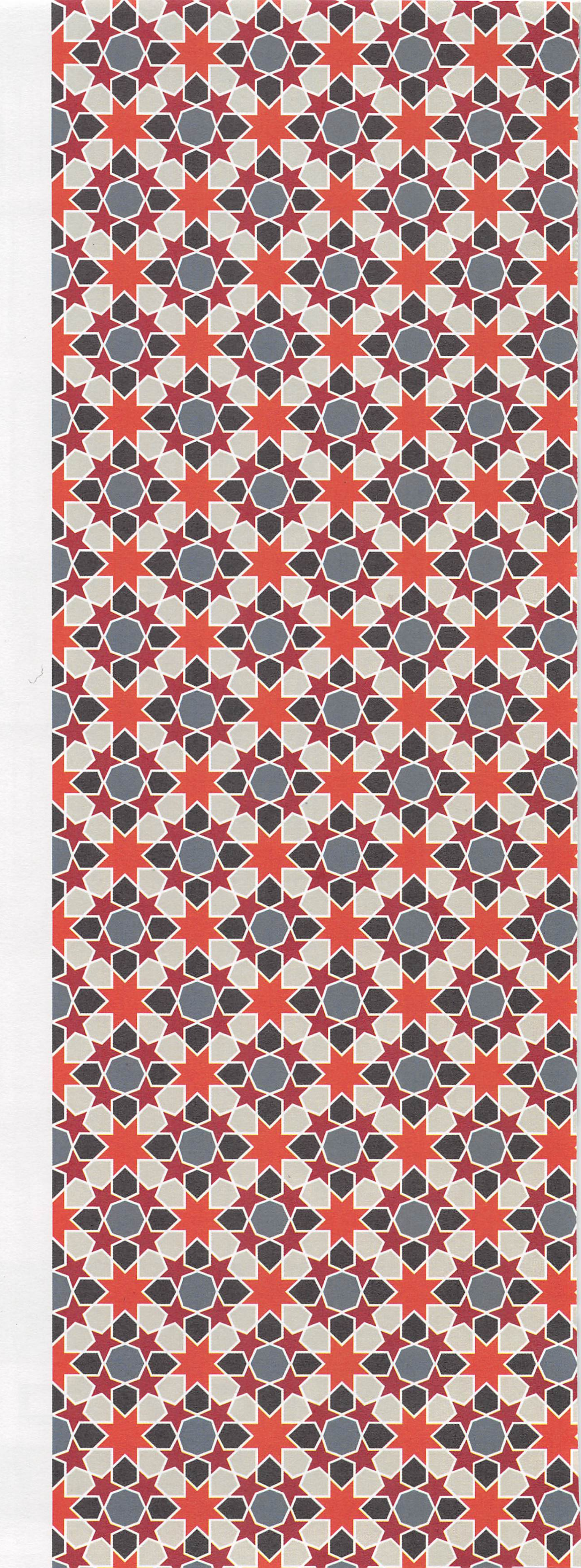
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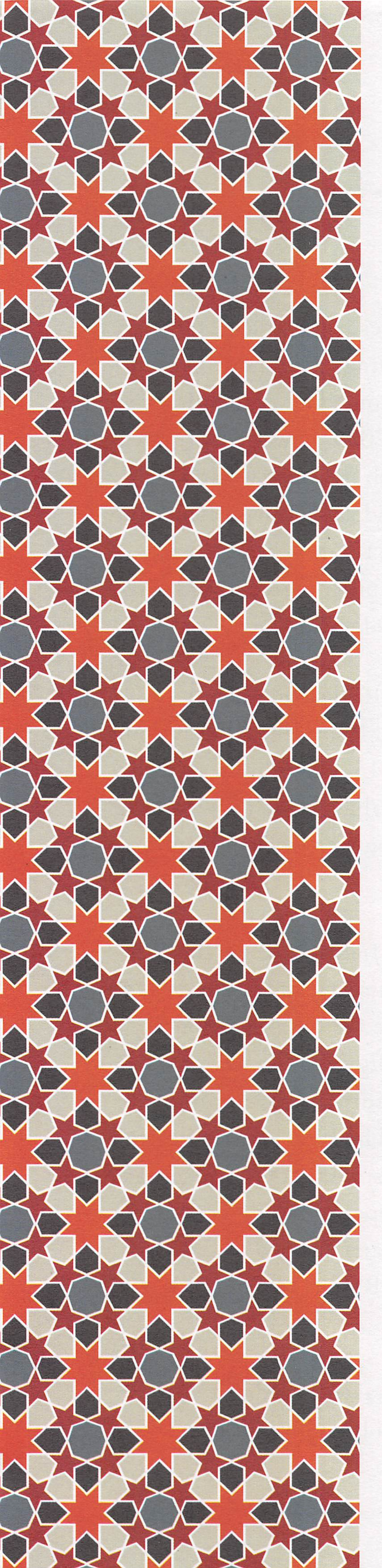
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All correspondence should be sent to
the Editing Manager on the following Address:
Hassan Bin Mohammed Center for Historical Studies
P. O. Box: 690 Doha - Qatar

E-mail : rtt@hbmhc.com

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3- References should be inserted automatically in sequential ordering.

4- Images and illustrations may be inserted provided that they are original, and the author shall obtain their publishing rights.

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6- The material should be written on A4 word document using Arial font, and it shall not exceed thirty pages including images, illustrations and other attachments.

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9- The researcher shall review the material related to his research after preparing it for publication and before sending it to printing press.

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11- The author shall provide a summary that does not exceed fifty words, and he shall also provide an abstract biography and 4x6 cm photo of the author.

12- The author shall receive one free copy of the issue in which his article is published.

INTRODUCTION

Hassan Bin Mohammed Center for Historical Studies is now pleased to publish the first issue of "Riwaq of History and Heritage", six months after publishing the empirical issue (zero), which was welcomed by academic and cultural milieus. By publishing that issue in June of 2015, Riwaq has revived an ancient method, where it was customary to publish newspapers and magazines in an issue to be introduced to cultural and academic milieus, and then to receive readers' opinions to take advantage of them. The editorial staff was keen to review readers' remarks on issue number (zero) in order to meet his expectations that go in line with the vision of the journal.

This issue contains high standard academic studies. Professor Rushdi Rashid has contributed in his valued essay about Al-Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham, on the occasion of the International Year of Light 2015, wherein he reviews the position and scientific production of Ibn Al-Haytham which sows in the soul a sense of faith and pride in belonging to a nation fathered such eminent scientists.

A group of authors well versed in their sciences and fields of research participate also in this issue in works vary between history and heritage as follows: "A Critical Reading of the Dimensions of the Ottoman Discourse through the Book of Evliya Celebi "Seyahatname of Egypt", "Kiswah and Drapes of the Prophet's Mosque and Chamber in Medina: A Preliminary Study of their Origin, History and Artistic Style", "The First Arabic Edition of Homer's Iliad", "The Historical Set of Surgical Instruments in Museums of the World", "King Abdul Aziz: his Divan, and Types of Najdi Traditions in the Book of The Arabian Phoenix", "Why Egyptians Turned to Arabic?", and finally, "Qatar in the British Archives: Reports from the Early Nineteenth Century".

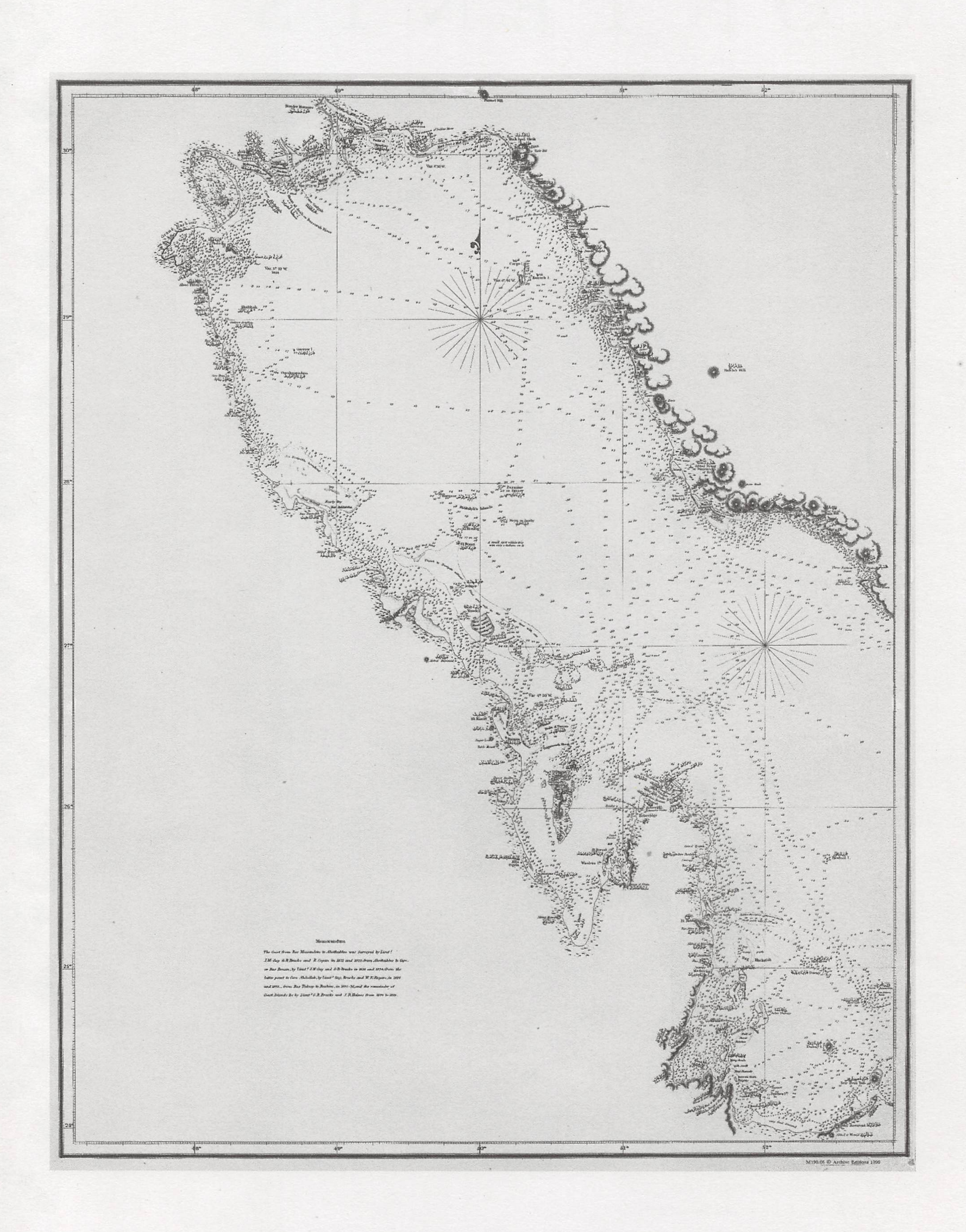
Riwaq hopes that this issue will add to our intellectual knowledge a worthwhile aide that contributes in developing it to a high level of novelty and originality in both form and content.

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Qatar in the British Archives:
Reports from the Early Nineteenth Century



Penelope Tuson

Penelope Tuson is an archivist and historian. She was formerly Curator of Middle East Archives in the India Office Records and is author of the guide to Records of the British Residency and Agencies in the Gulf. She has subsequently worked on international boundary negotiations in the region. Her special interest is women's history and her most recent book is Western Women Travelling East, 1716-1916.

All images in this article were chosen by the writer

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In the early nineteenth century British interest in the Gulf region, previously confined to maritime security and diplomacy, widened to include more detailed reporting on the communities along the coast and inland. Reports on Qatar include surprisingly sympathetic and in-depth accounts of local life and politics.

The British Archives

The British archives relating to Qatar and the wider Gulf region have been investigated and reproduced in numerous publications and research projects. They continue to surprise and excite academic historians and individual researchers with new information and ever more sophisticated and imaginative re-interpretation.

The archives, which are held mainly in London, in the British Library (India Office Records) and the UK National Archives at Kew, now span almost exactly four centuries. They date from the East India Company's quest for trading posts in the area in the early seventeenth century and they continue up to the present day. They are to be found in a diverse selection of archive groups and series, ranging from Foreign Office and India Office departmental records to East India Company ships' logs and naval surveys. Some of these series focus exclusively on Qatar and the Gulf; other series simply touch on events in the region and view them in a wider context. All of them, however, should be seen as complementing each other for the purpose of presenting the most comprehensive panorama of politics and daily life.

In the near half century since the British withdrawal from its administrative presence in the Gulf in 1971 there has been enormous interest in the scope and contents of the British collections. This interest was stimulated by the opening up of the archives of the British Political Residency and Agencies which were returned to London soon after the British withdrawal. The new files were added to the already voluminous collection of Gulf related archives in the India Office Records

It would be impossible and redundant to review in detail documentary publications which are now widely available. A select number of these are listed in the Bibliography below. In this article, by highlighting one short but important period in the early history of the Qatari nation, I would like to examine questions of scope and perspective and look at the ways in which

these records were created and how they have been investigated and presented by their British custodians and by the historians who have drawn on them.

Before the early twentieth century the archives were, by definition, private collections of factual information vital for the business and political interests of the East India Company and, later, for the imperial and diplomatic aspirations of the India Office and Government of India. British imperial policy was, of course, reviewed and criticised in the published newspaper articles and larger historical works of eminent historians, political theorists and journalists such as John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau and others. Some of them had limited access to the archives. Nevertheless, by the end of the nineteenth century the 'great' publications on India and its neighbours in the Gulf were mostly the work of diplomats, civil servants and soldiers in the employment of the imperial government. John Gordon Lorimer, the author of the monumental and unsurpassed Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, was a career civil servant. George Curzon (later Earl Curzon of Kedleston), whose Persia and the Persian Question was hugely influential in the formulation of British policy in the Gulf in the years before World War I, was not only Viceroy of India from 1898 to 1905 but also Foreign Secretary from 1919 to 1924. In other words, he was a diplomat with a passion for history but with an overriding mission to further British imperial interests.(1)

The printed and published British historiography of the Gulf before the late twentieth century might justly be described as the history of 'great men'. It records the creation and development of the independent nation-states of the Gulf through the biographies and activities of their leaders and founding fathers. In the British archives it further partners these stories with the accounts and exploits of the British rulers and representatives through whose eyes the entire history is recorded. Sir Lewis Pelly, J.G.Lorimer, Harold Dickson, Sir Percy Cox, among others, each of them in their different ways sympathetic to Gulf society, were nevertheless loyal servants of the British Crown and primarily motivated by its political, economic and military objectives. Outside of Government, the first professional academic histories of the region focussed mainly on this traditional imperial perspective. Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880, and the similarly entitled, Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1919, were published within a year of each other in 1967 and 1968 by J.B.Kelly and B.C.Busch.(2) Both were scholarly and meticulous in their research in the limited categories of British archives then open to the public. Both books have stood the test of time as reference works but neither historian had the opportunity of working in the records of the Gulf Residency and Agency Records, then still unavailable except to government officials.

Since 1971 the opportunities for research in the British archives have increased tremendously, the scope of available information widened by the new archive groups opened up and the traditional perspective challenged by the re-orientating and flowering of historical scholarship as a result of post-colonial and gender studies. Alongside British official government archives there are now many more sources available for research, including personal papers and memoirs, business and oil company archives, travel writings, maps and other visual materials. Most importantly, the British and other European archives are now increasingly being challenged and re-appraised in the light of more readily available local and regional Gulf sources. The question for contemporary researchers, then, is how much value can we give to these British sources? How comprehensive and how reliable are they and how much do they contribute to our understanding of Qatar history? In summary, how well do the British records tell the whole story?

British involvement in the Gulf

The quality, extent and reliability of British historical sources on Qatar may be traced through the lives of the most influential and well-known figures in the history of Qatari statehood: from Rahmah bin Jabir and 'Isa bin Tarif, and their early nineteenth century victories against the dominance of the Al Khalifah, to the statesmanship of Shaikhs Jasim bin Muhammad Al Thani and 'Abdullah bin Jasim in the creation of the twentieth-century Qatari nation. All of these leaders, at different times, were of major interest to the British, both as potential political allies and as stabilizing forces in the region. Their official relations with the British government and with other regional and international powers were meticulously recorded, analysed and monitored by British officials in the Gulf and also in London and India. Throughout the period, however, on the well-tried

1. John Gordon Lorimer: **Gazetteer of the Persian Gulf, Oman and Central Arabia,** (Calcutta: Government Press, 1908-15); George Nathaniel Curzon: **Persia and the Persian Question,** (London: 1892).
2. J.B.Kelly: **Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1795-1880,** (Oxford: 1968); Briton Cooper Busch: **Britain and the Persian Gulf, 1894-1914,** (Berkeley and Los Angeles: 1967).

and tested understanding that 'knowledge is power', the British also accumulated information which extended well beyond the requirements of diplomatic relations. Today's historians have therefore inherited an enormous and surprisingly wide-ranging treasure-trove of information. Even a short diversion from the most obvious political histories will reveal detailed and sometimes unusual sources for a study of daily life and culture in Qatar and its neighbouring communities.

The India Office Records (IOR), now held in the British Library, include the major archival collections on Qatar before 1950. Their scope, content and arrangement has been described elsewhere and is now well-known. However, they may briefly be described as falling in to three main categories: the records accumulated in London (for example, India Office Political and Secret Department files); the records accumulated by the British Administrations in India, to whom the Resident and Agents in the Gulf reported direct (for example, the series known as 'Proceedings'); and the records kept by the Political Resident and Agents stationed in the Gulf. The tumultuous events of the first half of the nineteenth century provide an opportunity to sample the variety of information in these collections and to evaluate the extent to which the archives present a balanced and in-depth picture of Qatari politics and society.

The 1820s to 1840s were a period during which the British sought not only to define, assert and protect their own interests in the region but also to acquire as much information as possible about local affairs. Contemporary British primary sources are, consequently, a rich fund of information, not only on individual political lives and inter-state politics, but also on society, topography and trade.

After over a century of trading expeditions and shipping to the Red Sea, the Gulf, India and further eastward to Japan and China, the English East India Company had concluded an agreement with the Persians in 1763 to allow them to establish a permanent agency at Bushire on the Gulf coast. Although initially intended as a base for trade, the Bushire post, and its various subsidiary offices later set up around the Arabian coast of the Gulf, gradually took on a more strategic and political role.

In 1820 the Preliminary and General treaties were signed by the British and the Shaikhs of the Lower Gulf, as well as Bahrain, in an attempt to end over a decade of rivalry for dominance of Gulf seaborne trade.[1] Qatar was not a signatory and a year later Bidda was infamously bombarded and destroyed by the East India Company's ship, Vestal. As a result of the maritime instability of the previous years the British government and the East India Company were forced to review their position in the Gulf. In 1821 the commander of British forces, Major General Lionel Smith recommended that British ships should cruise 'incessantly' until they improved their knowledge of the Arabian coast, about which they possessed 'lamentable ignorance'.[2] A year later, the British representative at Bushire was given responsibility for relations with the entire Gulf region and his title was defined as 'Resident' in the Gulf. Although the term 'Political Resident' was not actually used until the middle of the century, the post had in effect become a political one and the appointment of Lieutenant John MacLeod in 1822 symbolised the change in style and policy.[3]

Unlike his predecessors MacLeod was a British military officer rather than an East India Company civil servant, and for the rest of the nineteenth century his successors, with one exception, were either military or naval officers in the East India Company's and later the British Crown's forces in India. Lieutenant MacLeod's overriding duty, recorded in the very lengthy instructions given to him, was to work towards 'the conservation of the peace of the Gulf by the friendly interposition of our power and influence'. He was ordered to 'suggest a plan for securing authentic intelligence on the proceedings of the several chiefs on the coast, and a ready communication with them' and in response he proposed the appointment of local agents in some of the Gulf ports.[4] During the 1820s these local agents began to be employed at Muscat (1800/1840), Sharjah (1825) and Bahrain. It provided a network of British and locally appointed officials whose reports and correspondence now comprise a unique and surprisingly detailed historical record of the modern history of this region.[5]

Lieutenant MacLeod's report, produced in 1823 after he had personally visited the various Arab ports, was later described by British government officials as 'perhaps the most exhaustive and

1. **British Library,** IOR: R/15/1/735, General Treaty with the Arab Tribes of the Persian Gulf, 1820.
2. IOR: P, **Bombay Secret Proceedings,** vol. 49, Consultation 14, 16 May 1821.
3. For a brief account of the duties and responsibilities of the British Resident, see Penelope Tuson: **The Records of the British Residency and Agencies in the Persian Gulf,** (London: 1979).
4. Tuson (1979), p.2. IOR:L/PS/5/369, Enclosures to Secret Letters from Bombay, enclosure to Secret Letter 3 of 9 November 1822, and P/385/33, Bombay Political Proceedings, Consultation 13 of 26 March 1823.
5. See James Onley: **The Arabian Frontier of the British Raj. Merchants, Rulers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Gulf,** (Oxford: 2007).

interesting account of the state of Arab Tribes about the close of the first quarter of the 19th century'.[1] MacLeod found 'Bidaa' under populated but reported that, when he had explained the terms to them, the shaikhs were willing to abide by the 1820 treaty and they gave him a list of their boats to be registered. Disappointingly, he had little else to say about the population. However, his report was a focal point for a rapid expansion of British interest and fact-finding in the following three decades.[2]

The original reports from the British Residents and Agents in this period are, for the researcher, dramatic and absorbing. A few years after MacLeod had produced his assessment of local politics and society, one of his successors, Samuel Hennell, began providing even more information in a series of reports on tribes, resources and population. They were regarded by the British as being so important that they were subsequently up-dated and printed for the use of officials in the Gulf.[3] Hennell was born in 1800, the son of a silversmith. He joined the East India Company's military service in 1819 as an ensign in the Bombay Native Infantry and was first posted to the Gulf in 1826, at age of 26, as Assistant Resident. He remained there until 1852, as Acting Resident in the early 1830s and finally as Political Resident from 1838 to 1852. He was, therefore, knowledgeable and experienced in Gulf politics and fluent in Arabic. Indeed the historian J.B.Kelly regarded him as 'without doubt, the greatest Political Resident Britain has ever had in the Persian Gulf...No man', he wrote, 'did more to establish the influence of Britain and to promote peace in the Persian Gulf than Hennell'.[4]

During his two decades as Resident, however, Hennell did much more than simply cultivate British influence. He produced incredibly detailed reports about every meeting, conversation and letter received or sent to Gulf leaders. These were then forwarded to his superior officers in Bombay and onwards to the East India Company and British Government in London.

Rahmah bin Jabir, 'Isa bin Tarif and emerging statehood

Hennell's political reports are of great importance in Qatari history, not least because he was the dominating British official in the Gulf during the period when the activities of Rahmah bin Jabir and 'Isa bin Tarif were challenging regional rivals in the Qatar Peninsula. Hennell arrived in the Gulf in the same year that Rahmah, displaying both courage and obstinacy, allowed himself to be blown up on his own boat, together with his young son, rather than surrender to his enemies. Hennell reported that his death was 'felt as a blessing in every part of the Gulf', although, he added admiringly:

> *Equally ferocious and determined in all situations, the closing scene of his existence displayed the same stern and indomitable spirit which had characterised him all his life.*[5]

Hennell's later reports, dating from the early 1830s, also provide a sympathetic, lively and detailed account of Shaikh 'Isa bin Tarif's role as a pivotal force towards the creation of an independent Qatari state. 'Isa bin Tarif, was described by the late historian, Rosemarie Said Zahlan, as one of the early 'individual leaders who contributed to the establishment of the position of ruler of Qatar, and with it, the stability of the shaykhdom itself'. Her assessment is now widely acknowledged and accepted.[6] After his death in battle, in November 1847, 'Isa was described by Hennell as a man of 'superior energy and character'.[7] 'Isa bin Tarif's life coincided with the outburst of diplomatic and military activity by the British in the Gulf and a correspondingly detailed record of regional and local politics as viewed through British eyes. The progress of the Resident's meetings with Shaikh 'Isa, and with Bahraini leaders, are vividly recorded in dramatic detail in the lengthy and comprehensive reports submitted to the British government in London and to its officials in India.[8] At the same time, they reveal a great deal about the wider social and cultural background of the period.

On the tumultuous years of rebellion between 1835 and 1839, for example, the British archives are copious. In May 1839

1. J. A. Saldanha: **Précis of Correspondence regarding the Affairs of the Persian Gulf, 1801-1853,** (Calcutta: 1906), vol. 2, p. 155.
2. Report by the Resident, Lieutenant MacLeod, on his tour of the Arab ports, 27 February 1823, IOR:R/15/1/30, pp. 21-58, and printed in Saldanha, Précis, note 1, above.
3. IOR: V/23/217, Selections from **the Records of the Bombay Government,** No XXIV, New Series, 1856.
4. Kelly: **Britain and the Persian Gulf,** pp.408-409.
5. V/23/217, Bombay Selections, Hennell 'Sketch of the Proceedings (from 1809 to 1818) of Rahmah bin Jaubir, Chief of Khor Hassan', p. 528.
6. Rosemarie Said Zahlan: **The Creation of Qatar,** (London: 1979).
7. IOR: R/15/1/111, Letter from Samuel Hennell to the Secretary to the Government of Bombay, dated Bushire, 1 December 1847.
8. The details of 'Isa bin Tarif's activities are described by Kelly: **Britain and the Persian Gulf,** and more recently by Habibur Rahman: **The Emergence of Qatar,** (London: 2005).

SKETCH OF THE PROCEEDINGS

(FROM 1809 TO 1818)

OF

RAHMAH BIN JAUBIR,

CHIEF OF KHOR HASSAN;

PREPARED BY

MR. FRANCIS WARDEN,

MEMBER OF COUNCIL AT BOMBAY:

WITH

CONTINUATION TO THE PERIOD OF THAT CHIEF'S DEATH, IN 1826;

AND ALSO A

BRIEF SKETCH OF THE PROCEEDINGS

(DOWN TO THE YEAR 1831)

OF

SHAIKH BUSHEER BIN RAHMAH,

SON AND SUCCESSOR OF THE ABOVE CHIEF;

BY

LIEUTENANT S. HENNELL,

ASSISTANT RESIDENT IN THE PERSIAN GULF.

British officials in Bombay forwarded to London a collection of correspondence which they had received from Hennell describing the activities of 'Isa bin Tarif and his Bahraini allies or adversaries.[1] The collection runs to almost two hundred pages and includes a summary, compiled in Bombay, of events dating from the rebellion of the Al bin 'Ali in 1835. It also includes letters from Hennell to the Bahraini Shaikh 'Abdullah bin Ahmad and descriptions of Hennell's meetings with 'Isa bin Tarif and his followers. Hennell's sympathy for 'Isa bin Tarif is evident throughout, as is his frustration with the Bahrainis. In one letter, dated 26 October 1838, to 'Abdullah bin Ahmad Hennell deplores 'Abdullah's attempt to get the British to support an attack and summarises the British response to the unsettled situation:

> *In respect to what you write regarding the Ali Allee it would appear as if you thought that it afforded me satisfaction to see the Arabian tribes at war with each other ... You must be well aware that the wish of the British Government is that the inhabitants of the shores of this sea should follow their several pursuits in peace and safety without injury or molestation.*

On a visit to Muscat, in December 1839 Hennell met 'Isa bin Tarif several times. When the latter came to see the British Resident on board the East India Company's ship, the Clive, 'Isa wanted to know if he could have British protection if he and his followers were to return from Abu Dhabi to Qatar (Wakra). Hennell reported that he had told Shaikh 'Isa that 'however desirous I felt to assist him, in consideration of the wrongs he had sustained and the prudence and moderation he had displayed throughout these trying circumstances, still I could not give such a promise'.[2] When Shaikh 'Isa told Hennell that he and his followers had decided to leave for Qais island, the Resident replied that he had no objection and that he would even give him a letter to Shaikh Khalifa bin Shakhbut of Abu Dhabi asking that they be allowed to leave without 'hindrance or molestation'. 'This' he added, 'I consented to furnish, and moreover intend':

> *to exert my influence in favour of Esa and his Tribe, whenever I can do so without compromising the Government as I consider it highly inducive to our interest*

1. IOR: L/PS/5/375, vol. 13, Enclosure to Bombay Secret Letter 67 of 18 May 1839.
2. IOR: L/PS/5/381, Hennell to the Government of Bombay, 27 December 1839, enclosed in Letter No. 5 of 31 January 1840.

to maintain an influence over him, and of paramount importance to prevent a person of his determined and energetic character, with such numerous brave and devoted followers, throwing himself into the arms of Korshed Pasha, which despair might urge him to do, were no other opening left to him.

Hennell repeatedly told his superiors that an alliance between 'Isa bin Tarif and Kurshid Pasha against Bahrain would threaten the stability of the region. But he also sympathised with 'Isa's claims against Bahrain, which he often refers to as 'reasonable'. Earlier in the same year, when Hennell's Assistant, Lieutenant Edmunds, visited Bahrain, he had reported on the claims in detail:

During my stay at this place I have taken advantage of the best means which offered of discovering the nature of the property of which Bin Tareef and others were dispoiled and it appears that it consisted chiefly in their dwelling houses, date plantations and boats...As Bin Tareef was a considerable trader his sudden flight from Bahrain may have subjected him to considerable losses...[1]

As these brief selective extracts show, Samuel Hennell, and his assistants in the British Residency in the Gulf, regarded Shaikh 'Isa bin Tarif as a courageous and justifiably aggrieved leader, both powerful and potentially dangerous to British interests. Certainly he was regarded as better to have as a friend than an enemy. Hennell's report on Shaikh 'Isa's death in battle on 17 November 1847 is well known and justifiably so. Forwarding translations of letters from Britain's local agent in Bahrain, Hajji Jasim, it offers a visual account of both the battle and the fall of Shaikh 'Isa 'in an action fought on the mainland near Fowarat between his troops and those under the personal command of Sheik Mahomed ben Khuleefa, the Chief of Bahrein':

It appears that on the Bidda side eighty individuals were killed, including ten of the principal men of Sheik Esai's tribe. On the side of the Bahrein Sheik only ten fell. After this action the wounded men of Bidda were embarked in two boats and sent to that place, which I learn by later information, has since surrendered to Sheik Mahomed ben Khuleefa. The Nedgd troops furnished to the Bahrein Chief by the Wahabee Ameer Fysul's order appear, contrary to expectation, to have acted with fidelity and bravery. The old ex-Sheik of Bahrein was not present in the action, he having gone over to the Persian Coast, it is said, in order to obtain reinforcements. In doing this he has violated the understanding upon which he was permitted to act hostilely against Bahrein.

The reports by Residency Agent, Hajji Jasim, enclosed in Hennell's letter, provide more details of the battle and subsequent events. Hennell himself concluded that he could not but 'regret the death of a person of such superior energy and character as the late Sheik Esai' even though, with an overriding sense realpolitik and British political interests, it was 'satisfactory to know that the success of the Bahrein Chief, by confirming and consolidating his power, will lend finally to the maintenance of the peace and tranquillity of this Gulf.'[2]

Hennell's final comment confirms his own primary aim of maintaining peace on behalf of wider British strategic and commercial interests, whatever his personal sympathies towards individual leaders. At the same time, the brief extracts above show how much more locally focussed detail there is to be gathered from the British reports, while still keeping in mind the perspective and motives of the writers. The life of 'Isa bin Tarif is set in an exceptionally complicated period in the history of the British presence in the Gulf. Shaikh 'Isa is connected with power struggles and constantly changing alliances involving primarily Bahrain but also Abu Dhabi, Muscat, and the ever changing fortunes of the Saudi amirs of central Arabia and Hasa. The British continually attempted to remain neutral while at the same time maintaining and furthering their own economic and political priorities.

British Naval Surveys

At the same time as carefully monitoring and, when their own interests were challenged, intervening in political events, the British were also making good their lack of information on the navigation of the Gulf waters. Between 1785 and 1863 officers of the East India Company's Bombay Marine and Indian Navy carried out hydrographic surveys of the Gulf and the coastal

1. IOR: L/PS/5/375, Letter forwarded to Bombay by Hennell in April 1839.
2. IOR: L/PS/6/205, Letter from Hennell to the Secretary to the Government of Bombay, dated Bushire, 1 December 1847 (Bombay Political Letters Received, vol. 37, Governor in Council to Court, 31 Jan 1848) and also in IOR: R/15/1/111. Forwards translated extracts of letters dated 9th, 9th and 21st November from Native Agent at Bahrain reporting the death of Shaikh 'Isa bin Tarif.

waters and produced new charts for the Company and for the British Government. The most detailed and famous survey work was undertaken between 1820 and 1829 under Captain George Barnes Brucks and Lieutenant J.N.Guy. In spite of some inaccuracies this first Gulf survey was a remarkable achievement and resulted in a new set of charts and accompanying descriptive memoirs covering almost all of the Gulf coastline from Ras Masandam to the Shatt al-'Arab.

The survey of the Arabian side of the Gulf was completed in 1825 and included the well-known chart showing the Qatar peninsula which was published by the East India Company, under the supervision of its Company hydrographer, John Horsburgh, in 1832.(1) The detailed 'Trigonometrical plan of the Harbour of El Biddah', also by Guy and Brooks, was produced in 1823, with the 'View from the Anchorage' drawn by Michael Houghton, the Survey's draughtsman, from a sketch by Lieutenant F. Powell.(2)

In an interesting reflection on topography, language and cultural perspective, the issue of place-names was discussed during the surveying operations and questions were raised concerning the validity of British transliterations of original Arabic. When the charts were received in London in 1825 they also included a list of place names in Arabic. In 1828, towards the end of the survey programme, the Bombay Government suggested that 'the names of all the places in the Gulf be inserted [on the charts] in the Arabic character as well as the English'. Horsburgh, however, the Hydrographer, replied that:

> *It was found impossible to engrave these characters with accuracy as they are not inserted on the charts of the survey sent to this country, but were received upon a separate paper, and the spelling of the names of many places attached to the Arabic characters on this paper, differed so much from any spelling of the names of places given on the charts, that in several instances no affinity could be perceived between them. To prevent mistakes, it was therefore, under the circumstances, resolved to omit the engraving of the Arabic characters on the charts, which might have been effected with propriety, had these characters been affixed to the English spelling of the names on the original manuscript charts transmitted from Bombay.*(3)

In the end the Hydrographer relented and ordered the Arabic names to be engraved on the two-sheet general chart of the Gulf compiled in manuscript from the larger-scale coastal charts.(4)

Topographical Surveys and Reports

The hydrographic survey of the Gulf was accompanied by written accounts which described physical features as well as political and social aspects of towns and villages. Brucks himself produced the famous Memoir descriptive of the Navigation of the Gulf. It includes the well-known account of 'Al-Bidder Town' with its harbour and navigable channels, its core population of around 400 (augmented by about 1200 during the pearling season) and its economic dependence on fishing:

> *Al Bidder Town ... is situated at the bottom of a harbour [formed by reefs] ... When through, steer for the town, and anchor abreast the eastern tower, in three and a half fathoms, about half a mile off shore. This place contains about four hundred Arabs of the Nahune, Dooasir, and Abookara Tribes, and is frequented by the Monasir and other wandering tribes. In the pearl season the inhabitants are augmented to about twelve hundred, it being convenient to the banks, and so completely sheltered. The people are mostly fishermen; they have one or two trading boats, and, like all other inhabitants of this coast, take a large share in the pearl fishery.*(5)

Al-Huwailah and Fuwairat are also described, as well as Zubara, from where 'a number of fine Nujdee horses are still exported'.

Meanwhile, several British military and naval officers involved in the events leading up to and after the conclusion of the General Treaty also produced reports and travel accounts, some of which were published in the journals of learned societies such as the Bombay Geographical Society or the Royal Geographical Society

1. IOR: X/3630/19/1, Part of a chart from the Trigonometrical Survey, Western Sheet, showing **the Qatar Peninsula. Reproduced in Andrew S. Cook, Survey of the Shores and Islands of the Persian Gulf, 1820-1829,** (Archive Editions: 1990), vol. 2.
2. IOR: X/3694, Trigonometrical Plan of the Harbour of El Biddah and View from the Anchorage. Also reproduced in Cook, Survey, vol. 4.
3. IOR: E/4/1050, East India Company Marine and Forest Despatch to Bombay, 3 December 1828, quoted by Cook, Survey, vol. 1, Introduction, pp.xxiii-iv.
4. See note 1 above.
5. G. B. Brucks: Memoir descriptive of the Navigation of the Gulf...with brief notices of the Manners, Customs, Religion, Commerce and Resources of the People inhabiting its Shores and Islands, c. 1830, in Bombay Selections, vol. 24.

in London.[1] Others are only available in manuscript in the British archives. Many of the officials were inspired as much by a spirit of adventure, and the enthusiasm of the period for scientific discovery, as by official duty. Their accounts are correspondingly refreshing. For example Lieutenant William Henry Wyburd who travelled into the Hasa oasis via 'Uqair and Bahrain in 1832, actually asked to be temporarily relieved of his naval duties in order to travel inland, arguing that it was unfortunate that the government should have such an inadequate knowledge of the area at a time when geographical exploration was being pursued so ardently in Europe.[2]

On Qatar itself there are unpublished but more locally specific reports by another officer, Major Colebrook. In a letter to the Bombay Government in 1820, he discusses the migration of tribes in the Qatar Peninsula.[3] In a more detailed report, later printed by the Bombay Government and included in the famous Persian Gulf Précis series, he described the major towns and villages in the Qatar Peninsula, including:

> *Zobarah ... protected by a tower and occupied at present merely for the security of the fishermen that frequent it ... It has a Khor with three fathoms water which Buggalahs may enter.*
>
> *Khoor Hassam ... has a Khoor admitting Buggulahs drawing 2½ fathoms. It has no inhabitants at present.*
>
> *Guttur ... Or Ul Buddee once a considerable town, is protected by two square Ghurries near the sea shore; but containing no fresh water they are incapable of defence except against sudden incursions of Bedouins, another Ghurry is situated two miles inland and has fresh water with it. This could contain 200 men. There are remaining at Ul Buddee about 250 men, but the original inhabitants, who may be expected to return from Bahrein, will augment them to 900 or 1000 men, and if the Doasir tribe, who frequent the place as divers, again settle in it, from 600 to 800 men.*[4]

MEMOIR

DESCRIPTIVE OF THE

NAVIGATION OF THE GULF OF PERSIA;

WITH BRIEF NOTICES

OF THE

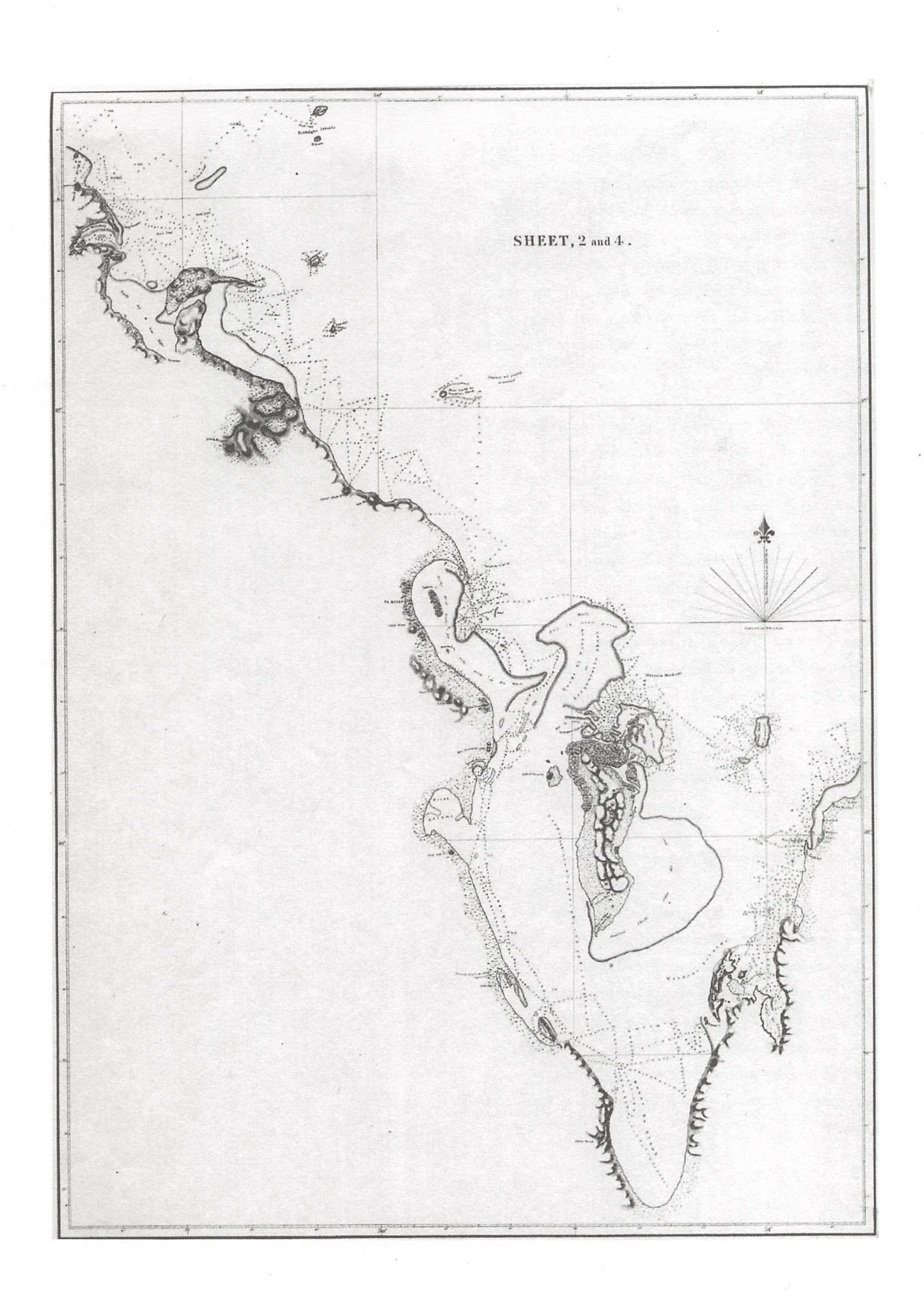
MANNERS, CUSTOMS, RELIGION, COMMERCE, AND RESOURCES OF THE PEOPLE INHABITING ITS SHORES AND ISLANDS.

PREPARED BY THE LATE

CAPTAIN GEORGE BARNES BRUCKS,

INDIAN NAVY.

1. See, for example, Lt. F. Whitelock: 'Notes taken during a journey in Oman and along the East Coast of Arabia', Transactions of **the Bombay Geographical Society,** vol. 1, (1836-38).
2. IOR: P/387/14, Bombay Political Proceedings, Consultation 2099 of 17 August 1831. See also Penelope Tuson: 'Lieutenant Wyburd's Journal of an Excursion into Arabia', **Arabian Studies,** vol. 5, (1979), pp. 21-36.
3. IOR: P, Range 385, vol. 4, Consultation of 25 April 1821, Colebrook to the Government of Bombay, 1 September 1820.
4. IOR: L/PS/20/C 238, J. A. Saldanha: **Précis of Turkish Expansion on the Arab Littoral of the Persian Gulf and Hasa and Katif Affairs, 1804-1904,** pp. 2-3.


SHEET, 2 and 4.

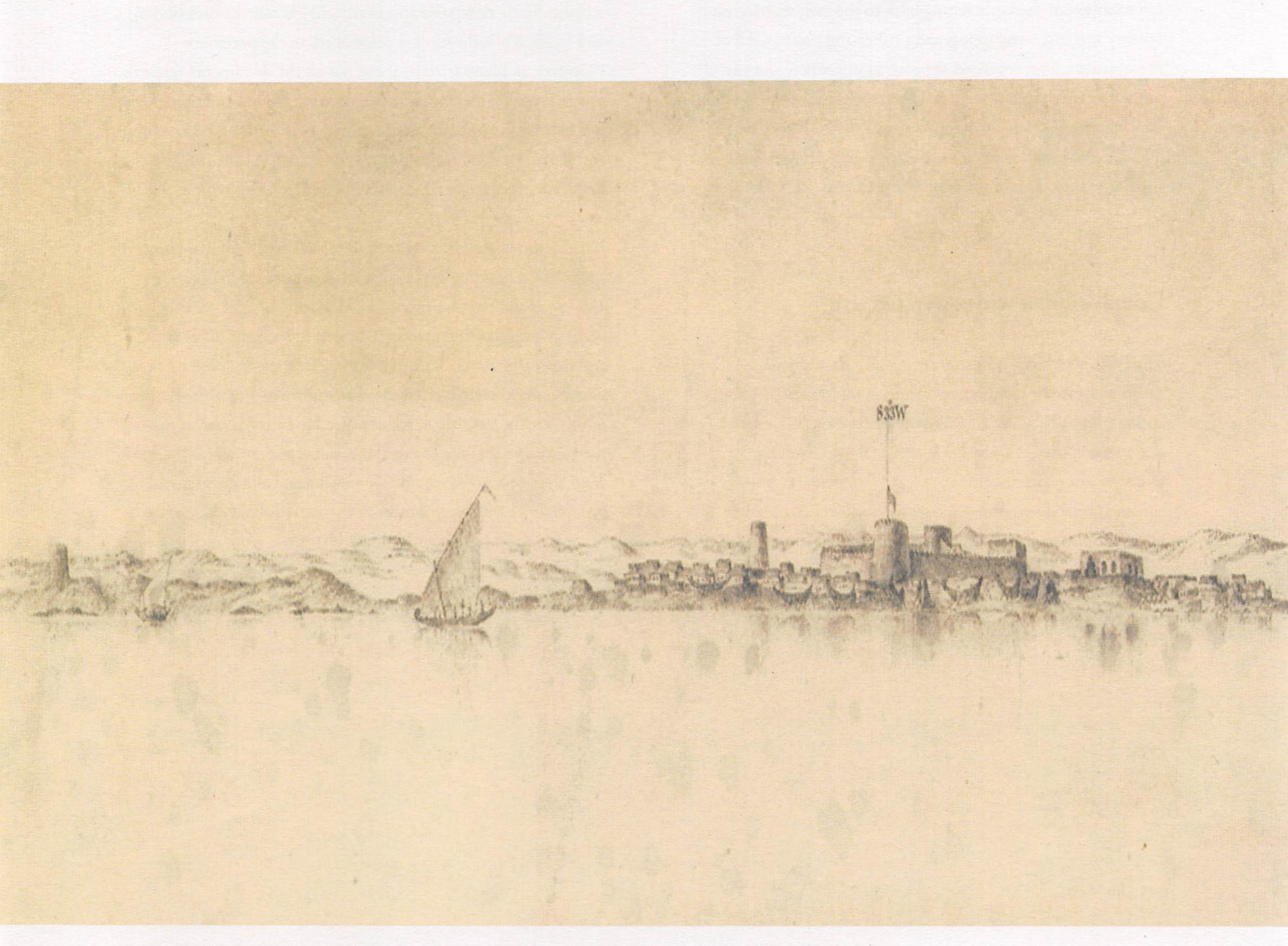
During the the 1840s and 1850s the series of historical and political studies compiled by Samuel Hennell and his predecessors were updated by his successors, Captain Arnold Kemball and by Captain Frederick Disbrowe.[1] Between them, these British officials produced an enormous amount of historical information on the Gulf, dating back to the early eighteenth century and including topography, tribes and politics. All of these surveys were regarded as being so important and useful to the British that they were collected together and printed in one volume in 1856, for the 'official use only' of future British officials, in the famous 'volume twenty four' of Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government.[2]

Conclusion: a wider perspective

The British archives, by definition, record developments in the Gulf from the perspective of British diplomatic, economic and military policy. At the same time, however, with careful examination they can reveal a surprisingly wide variety of information. Their content ranges from political and constitutional developments, regional conflicts and foreign interventions, to social and economic progress, topography, population trends, education, medicine and health. The scope and historical value of the material obviously reflects the changing perspectives of British political interests but it also reflects the individual personalities and abilities and interests of the officials themselves and the context in which they were writing. Their viewpoint and perspective is centred on London and India, while the Gulf is positioned on the periphery. However, as I have tried to show, not all the documents relate to imperial policy-making. The simple thirst for information, fuelled not only by the underlying quest for power but also by a genuine enthusiasm for the acquisition of knowledge, means that the British sources are unrivalled for the study of this region.

Now, in the twenty-first century, historians of the Gulf are properly aware of the bias implicit in colonial or imperial archives such as those of the British. Alternative local sources are increasingly being investigated and made available to fill in some of the gaps and to present a more balanced image of the past.[3] Nevertheless, historians acknowledge that the most substantial records are those of the British. The British archives need to be read from a local perspective so that the centre and periphery are reversed. But most of all, they need to be continually investigated and researched, layer by layer, in order to reveal more of the extraordinary items which never cease to amaze the inquisitive historian.

1. Lieutenant A.B.Kemball, Memoranda on the Resources, Localities and Relations of the Tribes inhabiting the Arabian Shores of the Gulf, 1845, **Bombay Selections,** vol. 24.
2. **Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government,** No.XXIV, New Series, 1856. They have subsequently been reprinted several times.
3. For example, Habibur Rahman: **The Emergence of Qatar.** Dr Rahman's work draws on Ottoman sources, Arabic manuscripts and local archaeology.



Drawing of Biddah Port as indicated in the marine surveying of Qatar coasts in 1823, which was done by Lieutenants Jay and Prideaux.